



Short Safety Subject

DON'T IGNORE CUTS AND SCRAPES

Most of us get cuts and scrapes at one time or another while doing our jobs, and much of the time we just shrug them off and keep on working. However, even small cuts and abrasions require immediate attention before a problem develops that you won't be able to ignore - a life threatening infection or illness that could keep you off work for a long time, or even kill you.

It's surprising how many people still get infections from untreated wounds, considering the availability of first aid supplies that are found in every supermarket. Many of us know someone who developed a serious infection which started with a small cut. Despite this knowledge we often let minor wounds go without any treatment at all. If an infection keeps you off the job, your decision to ignore the wound will have been a mistake.

Most of us know that germs and bacteria are always around us, but we usually don't think of them as being present on our skin, tools, desks, and on all the other things we work with, waiting to find an opening in the skin and start an infection. The two most common infections resulting from small harmless looking cuts and abrasions are tetanus and septicemia.

Tetanus or "lockjaw" is a serious infection of the nervous system, caused when tetanus bacterial spores are introduced into the bloodstream by puncture wounds, animal bites, gunshot wounds, cuts, or fractures. The toxin acts on the motor nerves and causes severe muscle spasms - most frequently in the jaw and facial muscles. The disease can be treated with an antitoxin or human immune globulin, but can be prevented by immunization if done before an injury occurs.

Septicemia or "blood poisoning" is an invasion of the bloodstream by bacteria. It results from an initial infection that the body's defenses are unable to control and which spreads throughout the body rapidly, causing a massive progressive infection. Symptoms include fever, chills, debility and skin eruption. The condition is usually treated with massive doses of antibiotics.

Preventing these problems in the first place is the best decision you can make. If you do get cut, don't wait until break time or until you get home to take care of it. Time is a critical factor. The American Medical Association recommends the following care for minor cuts and abrasions:

Never put your mouth over a cut. Your mouth harbors germs that can infect the wound.

Don't breathe on the wound (why do you think surgeons wear masks?).

Don't touch the cut with your fingers, unclean handkerchiefs or other soiled materials.

Immediately clean the wound and surrounding skin with soap and warm water, wiping away from the wound, and apply an antiseptic solution or ointment.

Hold a sterile pad firmly over the wound until the bleeding stops.

Replace the sterile pad and bandage as needed to keep the pad clean and dry.

There may have been some surprises for you in this advice - such as not putting your mouth on the cut or breathing on it. In any case, the emphasis is upon immediate cleaning of the cut or abrasion. If you decide not to seek medical treatment, keep an eye on the injury for signs of redness or swelling. If this *ever* occurs, you should see a health professional immediately.
